

Folse, Keith. (2004) *Vocabulary Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching*. University of Michigan Press.

Betty's comments:

The naturalists naysayed not only the explicit teaching of grammar but the explicit teaching of vocabulary as well. In his book *Vocabulary Myths*, Keith Folse looks at myths that arose during the naturalist era and concludes that the teaching of vocabulary is just as important as the teaching of grammar. Indeed, he suggests that the teaching of vocabulary is possibly even more important:

Without grammar, little communication may be possible; without vocabulary, **no** communication is possible. (25)

Reviewing the plethora of recent research on the teaching and learning of vocabulary, Folse reports that

... the question in L2 vocabulary teaching has shifted from *if* we should teach vocabulary to *when* and *how* we should be teaching vocabulary as well as *how much* and *which* vocabulary we should be working with. Teachers need to make vocabulary one of their primary course objectives. (28)

Out of the wide variety of issues that Folse looks at related to vocabulary teaching, I'll mention just one: vocabulary lists. I myself found vocabulary lists quite helpful as an adult language learner. I made lists of words to learn and learned them. The use of vocabulary lists, however, became much out of favor in the naturalist era in language teaching.

In this regard, Folse says, with typical common sense, that research appears to show that students' use of vocabulary lists is "neither detrimental nor miraculous." (36) He calls this age-old strategy "but one tool that can be used to help learners learn" (36) and reports that his students in Saudi Arabia "loved lists" (45). I will also report that my university-level adult students loved vocabulary lists and loved playing around with these words in class.

I find Folse's insights to be level-headed and clear-sighted. His observations ring true to a longtime teacher such as myself. If you're an experienced teacher and/or language learner, I bet you'll find yourself nodding "yes" throughout as you read *Vocabulary Myths*, or noting "yes!" in the margins as I did. And you'll also find a wealth of practical teaching suggestions.

Share your thoughts on Keith Folse's book on [Teacher Talk](#). Do you teach vocabulary directly? Do your students use vocabulary lists? Other teachers would love to know how you handle vocabulary teaching.